R4800-2A

ISSUE SIDESTEPPED

By dismissing a case on a technicality, the U.S. Supreme Court avoided rendering a decision on the highly controversial issue of whether the Constitution guarantees student groups the right to hold prayer and Bible-study meetings on school grounds.

See Page 11.

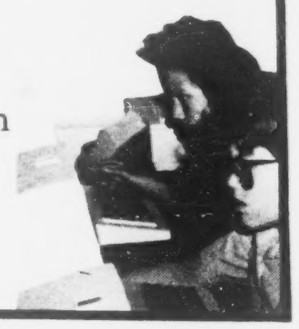
CHARGES LEVELED

A report by the General Accounting Office is sharply critical of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights for its "almost nonexistent" financial record-keeping, the salary earned by its chairman, and "indications of irregularities" in its use of outside consultants.

See Page 12.

'SOLUTION' DEBATED

Can school districts provide Chapter 1 services to religious-school pupils via computer? Enthusiasts in Forth Worth, for one, think so.



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EDUCATION WEEK

American Education's Newspaper of Record Volume V, Number 28 · April 2, 1986

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BACKGROUND CHECKS

To Root Out Child Abusers, States, Districts Requiring Teacher Investigations

By Robert Rothman

Chicago parents and community leaders staged an angry protest outside the city's Collins High School last month following reports that two of the school's teachers had been suspended for allegedly operating an international child pornography ring.

The group's demand was one heard with increasing frequency nationwide as the incidence of child sexual abuse gains greater visibility: that school officials screen prospective employees to ensure that their backgrounds do not include criminal convictions or histories as child abusers.

"We sent our kids to school for an education—to learn about English, to learn about history, to learn about math—not to be sexually exploited by teachers," said

U.S. Representative Cardiss Collins, after whose late husband the school was named.

Already stung by revelations that five other city teachers and a school janitor had been arrested on charges of child pornography or child sexual abuse, the Chicago Board of Education announced last week that it would check all job applicants to determine if they have criminal records.

Chicago joins a growing list of school districts and states that have moved to require such screening. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 22 states use or are considering using criminal-background checks to screen school employees, including teachers and other certified personnel.

States have for some time authorized employers to conduct background checks for securities dealers, armored-car drivers, and other occupations deemed sensitive, particularly in regard to the handling of money. But the concern over possible illicit behavior in the backgrounds of teachers is a relatively recent development, reflecting society's growing anxi-

Continued on Page 18

E.D. Aides Outline Complete Overhaul Of Data Collection

Plan Requires New Tests And Cooperative Efforts

By James Hertling

WASHINGTON—The "dramatic" overhaul of the Education Department's statistics operation, envisioned in a blueprint prepared by senior officials, will require the development of an ambitious new test for students and unprecedented cooperation by schools and state and local education agencies.

The plan, obtained from department officials last week, marks a near-final step in the year-old effort to design a new national data-collection system for precollegiate education.

But significant hurdles lie ahead. Department officials must convince the Congress to increase the current $8.4-million statistics budget. And, in what Emerson J. Elliott, the director of the statistics office, calls the "toughest part," experts must now "work out the actual plan that all can agree on."

The design calls for the creation of an "elementary/secondary integrated data system (ESIDS)," which would "for the first time" enable the department to provide

Continued on Page 15

Congress's Tax Maneuvers: Disruptions for School-Bond Sales

By J. R. Sirkin

In Coweta, Ga., 30 miles southwest of Atlanta, there's an old school gymnasium that nobody uses anymore.

It's a perfect spot for storing the $400,000 worth of new desks and filing cabinets that the Coweta County Public Schools purchased last month, but won't install until next fall, when it finishes a districtwide renovation project.

In Canyon, Tex., just south of Amarillo, they don't have a spare gymnasium. So school officials are squirreling away the costly new air conditioning and heating equipment they bought last month in a transportation shed.

Two districts, thousands of miles apart, facing a common problem: when they tried to float tax-exempt bonds earlier this year to pay for school repairs, they found they had to comply with several costly provisions of a tax-reform bill passed last December by the U.S. House of Representatives, even though the bill is not yet law, and even though parts of it—including the provision that led them to buy equipment months ahead of schedule—probably never will become law.

To negotiate their bond sales in a market unsettled by the House proposal, the two districts had to agree to spend a percentage of the proceeds within 30 days after the sale—thus, the warehoused equipment—and to forego an investment strategy that would have enabled them to leverage the proceeds into more cash.

"It's ridiculous," said Bobby W. Welch, the associate superintendent in Coweta County. "I'm surprised how Congress can see so poorly. I can't imagine people on that level making decisions of this type."

Meanwhile, school districts that could afford to wait to see what would happen in the Senate will fare much better—for the next several months, at least.

Rollercoaster Ride

Late last month, the market for tax-exempt bonds—including school bonds—swung back into high gear, capping a sever-

Continued on Page 17

One District Responds to Shortage With Bargains, Discounts for New Teachers

By Blake Rodman

In what may be an unprecedented move to attract new teachers, a consortium of business leaders in one of the nation's largest school districts has developed a package of consumer benefits for beginning teachers in the system.

Beginning this summer, Prince George's County, Md., will offer first-year teachers perquisites ranging from restaurant discounts and a month's free rent to lower consumer-loan rates and credit-card fee exemptions.

"We haven't heard of anything quite like this," said Howard Carroll, a spokesman for the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union.

The incentive plan is designed to help the 5,000-teacher district in suburban Washington hire the more than 400 new teachers it expects to need next year.

According to Maryland officials, the state will need as many as 6,000 new teachers next year, said Jacquelyn L. Lendsey, a county spokesman. But colleges and universities in the state are expected to graduate only about 3,000 prospective teachers.

"All the districts in Maryland are going to be competing for those 3,000 graduates," Ms. Lendsey said.

Although the starting salary for teachers in Prince George's schools is $15,700—cur-

Continued on Page 7

Finn Blasts NAEP's 'Misleading' Report On Bilingual Services

By James Crawford

WASHINGTON—A report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggesting that language-minority students are underserved by bilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language programs, is "misleading, oversimplified, and speculative," Education Department officials have charged.

Portions of NAEP's report, which was released in December, "verge on the irresponsible," wrote Chester E. Finn Jr., assistant secretary for educational research and improvement, in a Jan. 7 letter to the NAEP director, Archie Lapointe. NAEP is administered by the Educational Testing Service under a five-year, $20.3-million grant from

Continued on Page 14

IN SUMMARY

Preventing Obsolescence
Speakers at a conference on the future of vocational education have argued that it must be restructured to help the nation maintain its technological edge in a changing world economy. **Story on Page 6.**

Building Collaboration
Representatives of 16 partnerships between urban school districts and universities have been told that the collaboratives must be institutionalized to remain effective. **Story on Page 7.**

'We Definitely Knew the Risks'
Barbara Morgan, the Idaho teacher scheduled to be the next civilian to fly on the space shuttle, has reasserted her confidence in the space program and said she is "ready to fly." **Story on Page 8.**

Appeal Expected in Norfolk
A group of black parents is expected to ask the Supreme Court to strike down a controversial federal-court ruling permitting Norfolk, Va., schools to abandon busing. **Story on Page 8.**

Torts and Retorts
An Administration task force, citing more lawsuits and larger jury awards as factors in the liability-insurance crisis, has called for limits on lawyers' fees and punitive-damage awards. **Story on Page 12.**

'Completely Unacceptable'
Lobbyists for education groups are mobilizing opposition to the Senate's draft tax-reform plan, which they say would jeopardize state and local support for public schools. **Story on Page 13.**

An Alternative Spending Plan
The Senate is considering a 1987 budget plan that calls for new taxes and inflationary increases for defense while cutting spending for education and social services by $1.3 billion. **Story on Page 13.**

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THE WEEK

FEDERAL

H.H.S. Combines Six Major Programs Under One Umbrella

The Department of Health and Human Services this month announced plans to combine six major programs for low-income families into a single operating division.

The programs to be combined into the one division, to be called the Family Services Administration, are: Aid to Families With Dependent Children; child-support enforcement; the Community Services Block Grant program; low-income home-energy assistance; refugee and entrant assistance; and the Work Incentive Program.

The merger is designed to provide a central location to administer the major income-assistance and related programs for "efficiency and better management," and is "consistent with President Reagan's desire to encourage the strengthening of the American family," officials said.

The move is not subject to Congressional approval, a department spokesman said, and thus will take place next month.

Senate Panel Clears Measure To Extend Research Operation

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee has cleared a measure to reauthorize the Education Department's office of educational research and improvement, an extension considered critical to continued Congressional funding for the research agency.

The five-year extension, adopted as an amendment to the Higher Education Act, S 1965, would codify the reorganization of O.E.R.I. completed by Secretary of Education William J. Bennett last year and would recommend funding research and statistics activities at $72.2 million next year, slightly above the level requested by the department.

But the committee rejected a proposal by Mr. Bennett that critics said would have undermined the independence of the department's educational laboratories and centers.

The bill stipulates that the regional labs will continue to set their own research agendas.

The department proposal would have dropped the requirement that grants and contracts to the labs and centers fund work that they themselves propose.

The measure, drafted by Senator Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois, is less prescriptive than a draft circulated before the vote. It next goes to the full Senate.

The House has not passed a companion bill, but aides are circulating a proposal in preparation for the House-Senate conference on the higher-education bill.

Reagan To Nominate Magazine Editor as N.E.H. Chairman

President Reagan said last week that he would nominate Lynne Cheney, a senior editor of *The Washingtonian* magazine, as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the post formerly held by Secretary of Education William J. Bennett.

The President's previous nominee, Edward A. Curran, the former head of the National Institute of Education, was rejected by the Republican-controlled Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee last November. John Agresto has been the acting director since February 1985. *(See Education Week, Nov. 27, 1985.)*

Ms. Cheney, 44, wife of Representative Richard Cheney of Wyoming, has been with the magazine since 1983.

She holds a Ph.D. in British literature from the University of Wisconsin and has written two novels, *Executive Privilege* and *Sisters*. With her husband, she wrote *Kings of the Hill*, a history of the House of Representatives.

Last April, she was named to the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

The new nomination for the four-year position, which carries an annual salary of $73,600, will be sent to the Senate after a background check that will take four to six weeks, officials said.

The endowment, a $133-million agency, makes grants to individuals, institutions, and states for fellowships, research, educational programs, and public programs in the humanities.

Center To Assist Lawyers Prosecuting Child-Abuse Cases

In response to the increasing number of child-abuse cases, the National District Attorneys Association has established a national center to provide information and technical assistance to prosecutors.

The center, funded by a $645,000 grant from the Justice Department's office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, will set up an information clearinghouse, publish manuals, and provide legal research and assistance, according to James C. Shine, the center's director.

Prosecutors from more than 100 cities expressed a need for such a center, Mr. Shine added.

He said that the center will include four lawyers with experience in prosecuting child-abuse cases. "We're looking for people with good trial experience who are also sensitive to victims of child abuse," Mr. Shine said.

NATIONAL

No Progress Found In Physical Fitness Of Schoolchildren

Despite the nation's apparent preoccupation with physical fitness, America's children are in no better shape now than they were a decade ago, according to a report from the University of Michigan.

The report, sponsored by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, found "no general improvement" in children's strength, speed, flexibility, and endurance in 1985, as compared with data collected in 1975 and 1965.

The 1985 data were gathered in tests of 18,857 public-school children ages 6 to 17 at 187 schools nationwide.

"The findings confirm what numerous studies have shown—that American youth are in poor physical shape in spite of the fact that over 80 percent of students in grades 5-12 are enrolled in physical-education classes," said Guy G. Reiff, the professor of physical education who directed the study.

"Much of the fault lies with the content of these classes, which typically emphasize games rather than exercise that builds strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular endurance," he added.

The survey found that 40 percent of boys ages 6-12 and 70 percent of girls could not do more than one pull-up; 55 percent of the girls could not do any. Forty percent of the boys ages 6-15 could not touch their toes while seated on the floor with legs outstretched, and girls ages 10, 11, and 14 were "significantly" slower in the 50-yard dash than girls that age were in the 1975 survey.

STATES

Michigan Chief To Sue District Over Reform Law

State Superintendent of Schools Phillip E. Runkel of Michigan has decided to sue a school district that is bucking one of the state's education-reform laws by refusing to make up five days of classes its students missed this year because of snow.

A spokesman for Mr. Runkel said the state chief is "not pleased" with the Houghton Lake Community School Board, which last month passed a resolution saying the district would not make up the snow days unless ordered to do so by a court.

The board's action has caused outrage among some state lawmakers, who two years ago passed a law requiring school districts to hold classes for a minimum of 180 days and 900 hours. If those days are missed, they have to be made up or the school district loses 1/180th of the money it receives from the state for each day skipped. But the school district nevertheless says it will fight Mr. Runkel's suit. Mr. Runkel's spokesman said the Houghton district is the only one in the state so far that has challenged the new law.

Test Results Show California Pupils Weak in History

A panel of California history and social-science teachers, after reviewing the results of the first California Assessment Program examination in those subject areas, has recommended that schools provide more instructional opportunities for students to learn about this country and others.

Some 300,000 8th-grade students took the test last spring for the first time, along with CAP exams in reading, written expression, and mathematics.

Although panel members said they were pleased by students' performance on the critical-thinking, economics, and basic-skills portions of the exam, and judged performance in U.S. history and citizenship/government to be "relatively good," they acknowledged that students had the most difficulty with questions on geography and world history and cultures.

"The majority of students who took the test did not understand the major forces and events that shaped the world in which they now live," the panel said in the annual CAP report.

For example, 40 percent of the students could not identify "democracy" correctly—nearly 21 percent said that a democracy is a government in which only the educated can vote.

According to the panel, students appeared unable to link the significance of such documents as the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights to contemporary life.

"The committee is very concerned that students who are unaware of this critical linkage will not be able to make reasoned decisions on contemporary issues as adults and will have only limited ability to participate in a representative democracy," the panel's report said.

Number of High-School Graduates Declines

Reflecting the continuing decline in the number of 18-year-olds in the U.S. population, the number of students graduating from high-school dropped in 48 of the 50 states between 1980 and 1984, from 2.9 million to 2.5 million. Only Nevada and Ohio graduated more students in 1984 and both of those states graduated fewer students that year than in 1983. The figures were gathered from each state by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Colorado.

High School Graduates by State, 1979-80 Through 1983-84*

State	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
Alabama (pub)	45,190	44,894	45,409	44,352	42,021
Alaska (pub)	5,223	5,358	5,477	5,558	5,457
Arizona (pub)	28,633	28,146	28,049	29,867	26,530
Arkansas (pub)	29,052	29,414	29,710	28,447	27,049
California (com)	281,363	273,973	276,454	272,896	269,024
Colorado (pub)	36,804	35,993	35,494	34,875	32,954
Connecticut (com)	43,710	44,598	43,735	42,433	39,712
Delaware** (com)	10,366	11,001	10,480	10,125	9,631
District of Columbia (pub)	5,124	4,848	4,521	4,909	4,073
Florida	97,607 (com)	99,511 (com)	98,773 (com)	86,871 (pub)	84,496 (pub)
Georgia (pub)	62,708	62,963	64,489	63,293	60,713
Hawaii (com)	14,013	14,610	13,948	12,943	12,990
Idaho (pub)	13,246	12,931	12,554	12,130	11,717
Illinois (com)	154,716	156,981	156,802	148,861	141,935
Indiana (com)	79,929	79,760	81,258	76,778	72,004
Iowa (pub)	43,151	42,355	41,509	39,612	37,248
Kansas (pub)	30,890	29,397	28,298	28,316	26,730
Kentucky (com)	45,445	46,392	46,818	44,963	43,536
Louisiana (com)	54,931	54,571	54,428	47,019	45,249
Maine (pub)	15,445	15,554	15,186	14,764	13,935
Maryland (com)	61,367	60,893	61,578	59,353	57,440
Massachusetts (pub)	73,082	74,876	74,299	71,225	65,855
Michigan (pub)	124,316	124,372	121,030	115,205	— †
Minnesota (com)	70,358	68,443	66,429	63,113	59,593
Mississippi (pub)	27,586	28,083	28,023	27,271	26,324
Missouri (pub)	62,265	60,340	59,872	56,420	53,388
Montana (com)	12,135	11,634	11,162	10,689	10,224
Nebraska (com)	24,803	23,729	23,516	22,197	20,807
Nevada (com)	8,773	9,375	9,599	9,349	9,096
New Hampshire (pub)	11,722	11,938	11,763	11,478	11,506
New Jersey (pub)	94,564	94,157	93,750	90,048	87,297
New Mexico (com)	19,043	18,693	18,344	17,795	17,304
New York (com)	235,937	230,237	226,856	216,082	205,883
North Carolina (pub)	70,862	70,168	71,210	68,783	66,803
North Dakota (com)	10,797	10,730	10,226	9,572	9,157
Ohio (com)	144,169	154,489	154,597	152,163	149,082
Oklahoma (pub)	39,305	38,823	38,347	36,799	35,254
Oregon (pub)	29,939	29,354	28,780	28,099	27,214
Pennsylvania (com)	170,646	169,075	167,541	160,329	154,744
Rhode Island (pub)	10,864	10,719	10,585	10,318	9,652
South Carolina	40,175 (com)	40,074 (com)	41,127 (com)	37,570 (pub)	35,534 (pub)
South Dakota (pub)	10,689	10,431	9,864	9,206	8,638
Tennessee (pub)	50,033	51,021	51,646	46,888	49,054
Texas (pub)	171,449	171,665	172,099	168,897	161,580
Utah (pub)	20,035	19,886	19,400	19,210	19,350
Vermont (pub)	6,627	6,561	6,659	6,181	5,993
Virginia (pub)	66,539	67,147	67,809	65,571	62,177
Washington (com)	52,928	52,504	52,595	49,446	47,327
West Virginia (com)	24,376	24,300	24,352	24,296	23,309
Wisconsin (com)	76,233	75,692	74,246	71,037	68,541
Wyoming (pub)	6,072	6,161	5,999	5,909	5,764
U.S.Total	**2,925,235**	**2,918,820**	**2,906,695**	**2,789,511**	**2,570,894†**

* The designation after the state or under the group of numbers tells whether the figures presented are for public graduates (pub) only or for public and nonpublic graduates combined (com).
** Includes traditional and nontraditional (night school, G.E.D., etc.).
† Michigan excluded for 1983-84; not available.
Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education based on information provided by state education offices.

DISTRICTS

Meningitis Prompts School Closings In Virginia Town

The six public schools of Staunton, Va., were closed for three days late last month after an outbreak of life-threatening bacterial meningitis sent a wave of panic through the Shenandoah Valley town.

Seven of the town's children—one preschool student, one 6th grader, and five high-school students—have contracted meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes enclosing the brain and spinal cord that can cause brain damage, hearing loss, speech defects, and death.

The disease is not generally considered highly infectious and can be treated effectively with antibiotics if detected in its early stages.

The most recent case of the disease was diagnosed March 18, according to Superintendent of Schools Kenneth B. Frank, who said he closed the district's schools because of the "extremely high anxiety level" among the community's 22,000 residents.

"I felt we needed to buy time to let people calm down and let the incubation period pass," Mr. Frank said.

One high-school student, whose legs had to be amputated as a result of the disease, was listed in stable but critical condition last week, according to Mr. Frank.

Five of the other children who contracted the disease, however, were out of the hospital, he said. Another remained hospitalized but in good condition.

Custodians Take Asbestos Tests In New York

School custodians in New York City are undergoing medical tests to detect asbestos-related health problems following the diagnosis, in two workers, of asbestosis, a disabling lung disease linked to exposure to friable asbestos.

The examinations will be performed by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and financed by the New York City Board of Education under a contract agreement with the custodians' union.

Despite school officials' efforts to clean up asbestos in areas frequented by students and teachers, "the boiler rooms are still loaded with the stuff and that's where our members spend a lot of their time," said John W. Holahan, president of Local 891 of the operating engineers' union.

About 560 of the local's 1,000 members have signed up for the tests, Mr. Holahan reported. School cleaners and boiler-room operators, however, are represented by other unions and will not be included in the screening, he said.

The custodians, who have a supervisory role, tend to have higher seniority and are considered at higher risk. Results of the screening should be available later this month, Mr. Holahan said.

Boy's Story About Suicide Precedes His Own Death

A Chester, Ill., boy who wrote a classroom story about a lonely child who suffocates himself acted out the part on the night his teacher read the disturbing account.

Scott Phillips, a 6th-grade student at the Chester Grade School, committed suicide by placing a plastic bag over his head on March 17, the night after he turned in the story, titled "Suicide Mistake." The main character in the story was, like the author, an 11-year-old boy who had recently moved to a new home.

After reading the story, the boy's language-arts teacher called the principal to express concern, according to Hal Diebolt, superintendent of Chester schools. But by the time they reached the boy's parents, it was too late. The youth's mother, Cynthia Phillips, had found her son dead in his room earlier that evening.

Mr. Diebolt said students at the K-8 school in the town of 8,000 are "coping well." Counseling has been offered to both staff members and students, he said.

Wichita School Chief Target of Ouster

The Wichita (Kan.) Board of Education recently moved to oust Ronald G. McIntire, the city's school superintendent, first suspending him with pay and then—two weeks later—presenting him with a list of reasons why he should be fired.

The nature of the charges remains a mystery. The list, prepared by the board's lawyer, has not been made public by either party.

Mr. McIntire, whose current three-year contract expires in 1988, is not trying to preserve his job, but will seek a financial settlement with the board, according to Lee H. Woodard, the superintendent's lawyer. Mr. McIntire currently receives an annual salary of $76,500 and other fringe benefits valued at $7,000, Mr. Woodard said.

If a settlement is not reached, the board must hold a hearing to determine if "just cause" exists to fire Mr. McIntire, the lawyer said.

"If we can't get this thing settled under fair terms in the next three weeks, we will ask for a public hearing or go to court or both," Mr. Woodard said. He said he had read the more than 50 charges leveled against the superintendent and saw nothing "that can't be talked about in public."

Judge Bars Klan From Picketing Georgia Schools

A federal judge has ordered Ku Klux Klan members to stop picketing a middle school and high school in Madison County, Ga., and to refrain from harassing students or their families.

U.S. District Judge Duross Fitzpatrick issued the temporary restraining order at the request of a lawyer for the parents of 22 black children who have filed a $4.9-million lawsuit against the Klan, charging it with disrupting the education of their children.

The suit alleges that Klan members have repeatedly harassed black students on school buses. In one incident cited in the suit, Klan members reportedly boarded a bus and uttered racial slurs while distributing leaflets warning white students against dating black students.

"The injunctive relief that we seek in the case is of paramount importance, more important than the money," said Charles Mathis, the lawyer representing the parents. "If these actions are allowed to go unanswered, it's going to further interfere with the rights of the children to an education."

James R. Perkins, superintendent of Madison schools, said district officials have removed Klan literature that had been posted in the schools and have met with concerned parents and their children.